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TAGS: [KN](#) [KS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE MAKES ONLINE GAINS

Classified By: POL Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In the 2002 presidential election the conservative Grand National Party (GNP) lost the battle for internet supremacy. In an effort to right that wrong, GNP candidate Lee Myung-bak is using the internet to boost visibility among young voters, already a bastion of his political support. Progressive candidates also have made use of websites, user created content (UCC), and online communities, though their websites are, ironically, more conservative than Lee's. The GNP's efforts to revitalize its web presence has created a balance of liberal and conservative voices on the internet, though flagging UCC contributions seem to reflect the general population's ambivalence about the December presidential election. End Summary.

GNP Goal: Take back the Net

¶2. (SBU) GNP leaders widely recognize that a key reason for their loss in the last presidential election in 2002 was the party's failure to make adequate use of the internet. In a liberal-leaning site popular at the time, "citizen reporters" helped build support for Roh Moo-hyun. The night before the election a former Roh press secretary posted to the site an emotional plea urging young people to go to the polls and vote for Roh. Since then, the National Election Commission has strengthened its rules to control online campaigning and now prohibits repeated postings that support or criticize a party or a candidate. The Commission also increased its team of cyber space monitors from one person in 2002 to the current 21 with 900 part-time workers.

Is Lee Cool?

¶3. (SBU) In a review of the leading candidates' websites, the GNP's strategy is clear. Lee Myung-bak's site (<http://www.mbplaza.net>) is designed to appeal to the younger voters, with an animated figure representing Lee on its front page. Until recently, the site also used to feature a boat-riding computer game which taught users about Lee's plan to build a canal across the peninsula. Lee also, like the other candidates, has a robust Cyworld (a website roughly equivalent to MySpace) page, and user created videos -- likely made by campaign staffers -- portray Lee as hip. For example, one video superimposed Lee's face over Bruce

Willis's in a parody of the latest "Die Hard" movie while another UCC contributor insists that Lee bears an uncanny resemblance to heavy metal rocker, Marilyn Manson.

¶4. (SBU) In contrast, on their respective websites the three leading progressive United New Democratic Party (UNDP) candidates, Chung Dong-young (<http://www.cdy21.net>), Sohn Hak-kyu (<http://www.hq.or.kr>), and Lee Hae-chan (<http://www.chans4u.net>), all look staid and formal. These candidates also make use of UCC and Cyworld, though the target audience is clearly older. Compared to Lee Myung-bak's homepage that apparently involved a significant investment of time and resources, those of the liberal candidates appear hastily built. All their home pages are covered with advertisements calling for campaign fund donations and propaganda for more primary votes - perhaps mirroring the extent of the liberal party's desperation.

COMMENT

¶4. (C) Despite the candidates' robust internet presences, the malaise and general disinterest in this election among netizens will probably prevent a repeat of the 2002 internet wave that helped sweep Roh to victory. Voter turnout during the UNDP primary has been low, hovering between 10 and 25 percent. The UNDP miscalculated its ability to garner and sustain enthusiasm for its open, serial primaries, set to end October 14. The majority of campaign staffers, politicians, and election experts Poloffs have met with in recent days -- even those squarely in the progressive camp -- consider the election outcome a foregone conclusion. The internet, an important tool for any candidate, is so far helping Lee. He has a head start over the eventual UNDP candidate in terms of money and time -- he has had two months as candidate to polish his policies and hone his message on the net and elsewhere while the UNDP has been engaging in internecine warfare that continues to turn off more and more voters.

VERSHBOW